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# MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES

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## CHAUCER'S *CLERKES TALE*

Until Professor A. S. Cook argued for the use of the *Ménagier de Paris* as an intermediary (see note at the conclusion of this article), no one had ever advanced serious doubt that the only written source followed by Chaucer in the *Clerkes Tale* is Petrarch's Latin translation of Boccaccio's tenth novel, tenth day of the *Decameron*. Chaucer's work seems in places so close a translation of Petrarch, and in general so strictly dependent on him for order of details, that the matter of relationship between Chaucer and Petrarch, and Petrarch and Boccaccio, had almost been laid aside as settled.

The usual belief is that the main part of the *Clerkes Tale* is a rather close translation of Petrarch's *De obedientia ac fide uxoria Mythologia*, itself a free translation or redaction of Boccaccio, though the story acquires much originality in its telling at Chaucer's hands.<sup>1</sup> Additional proof that Petrarch's version was Chaucer's source, thinks Skeat, is furnished by the fact that quotations from Petrarch appear in appropriate places in the margins of the Ellesmere and Hengwrt mss.<sup>2</sup>

The possibility of Chaucer's having known the *Decameron* is regarded as so lacking in proof that it is not seriously considered. Skeat takes Tyrwhitt to task for wondering why Chaucer should have owned an obligation to Petrarch instead of to Boccaccio.<sup>3</sup>

In the following comparison of passages in Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Petrarch I give instances in which, to say the least, certain

<sup>1</sup> For representative conclusions see Skeat's *Chaucer*, III, pp. 453-4; J. W. Hale, *Note on Chaucer's Clerk's Tale*, Chaucer Soc., *Originals and Analogues*, p. 173; Lilian Winstanley, *The Clerke's Tale and the Squire's Tale*, Cambridge, 1908, p. lxxxv.

<sup>2</sup> Skeat's *Chaucer*, III, p. 455.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, III, p. 455.

phrases of Chaucer's are closer to the Italian than to the Latin. Sometimes the English is so near the Italian and so different from the Latin that the resemblance is striking. In a few cases more or less important details are not in the Latin, and are in both Italian and English. Since it will be disputed by no one that the *Clerkes Tale* is in general a close rendering of Petrarch, such occasional resemblances between Chaucer and Boccaccio are certainly rather startling and may be highly significant.

The text followed for both Petrarch's and Boccaccio's tale is that published by the Chaucer Society.<sup>4</sup> Page references are to this publication. Italics are, of course, my own.

Resemblances to Boccaccio do not begin to appear until rather late in Chaucer's tale, not until the "pars quarta" is reached, in fact.

But whan thise tydinges cam to Grisildis,  
I deme that *hir herte was ful wo*.  
But she, y lyke sad for evermo,  
*Disposed was*, this humble creature,  
*Th'adversitee of fortune al t'endure*. (ll. 696-700.)

La donna sentendo queste cose, e parendole dovere sperare di ritornare a casa del padre, e forse a guardar le pecore come altra volta aveva fatto, e vedere ad un' altra donna tener colui al quale ella voleva tutto il suo bene, *forte in sè medesima si dolea*; ma pur, come *l'altre ingiurie della fortuna aveva sostenute*, così con fermo viso *si dispose a questa dover sostenere*. (pages 163-4.)

Quae fama cūm ad Griseldis notitiam peruenisset, tristis ut puto, sed ut quae semel de se suisque de sortibus statuisset, inconcussa constitit, expectans quid de se ille decerneret, cui se & sua cuncta subiecerat. (p. 164.)

The likeness between "I deme that *hir herte was ful wo*" and "*forte in sè medesima si dolea*," together with the departure of the English from "*tristis ut puto*," is apparent. It is true that "I deme" is a close rendering by Chaucer of Petrarch's "*ut puto*," but in what follows from Chaucer there are words and locutions which are remarkably near Boccaccio's. While "*adversitee of fortune*" may, of course, have been suggested by "*de se suisque de sortibus*," since "*sortibus*" could well be translated "fate" or

<sup>4</sup> *Originals and Analogues*.

“fortune,” nevertheless “ingiurie della fortuna” is obviously much closer to Chaucer’s phrase. “Dispose” and “disposed” strike the eye at once.

But shortly if this storie I tellen shal,  
This markis writen hath in special  
A lettre in which he sheweth his entente,  
And secrely he to Boloigne it sente.

*To th' erl of Panik, which that hadde tho  
Wedded his suster, preyde he specially  
To bringen hoom agayn his children two  
In honourable estaat al openly.  
But o thing he him preyde outerly,  
That he to no wight, though men wolde enquire,  
Sholde nat telle, whos children that they were,*

*But seye, the mayden sholde y-wedded be  
Un-to the markis of Saluce anon.  
And as this erl was preyed, so dide he;  
For at day set he on his wey is goon  
Toward Saluce, and lordes many oon,  
In riche array, this mayden for to gyde;  
Hir yonge brother ryding hir bisyde.*

Arrayed was toward hir mariage  
This fresshe mayde, ful of gemmes clere;  
Hir brother, which that seven yeer was of age,  
Arrayed eek ful fresh in his manere.  
And thus in greet noblesse and with glad chere,  
Toward Saluces shaping hir journey,  
Fro day to day they ryden in hir wey. (ll. 704-28.)

Gualtieri, il quale diligentemente aveva i figliuoli fatti allevare in Bologna alla sua parente, *che maritata era in casa de' conti da Panago* (essendo già la fanciulla d'età di dodici anni, la più bella cosa che mai si vedesse, e il fanciullo era di sei) *avea mandato a Bologna al parente suo pregandol che gli piacesse di dovere con questa sua figliuola e col figliuolo venire a Saluzzo, e ordinare di menare bella e orrevole compagnia con seco, e di dire a tutti che costei per sua moglie gli menasse, senza manifestare alcuna cosa ad alcuno chi ella si fosse altramenti.* (p. 167.)

Miserat iam ille Bononiam cognatum que rogauerat, ut ad se filios suos adduceret, fama undique diffusa uirginem illam sibi in coniugium adduci. Quod ille fideliter executurus, puellam iam nubilem, excellentem forma praeclaròque conspicuam

ornatu, germanumque suum simul annum iam septimum agentem, ducens cum eximia nobilium comitiua, statuto die iter arripuit. (p. 164.)

A comparison of the above passages will be somewhat more complicated than any made so far, for the reason that the incident of Walter's sending for his children comes in Boccaccio at a later point than it does in Petrarch or in Chaucer. Chaucer follows Petrarch by telling of Walter's message directly after he has told of Walter's getting the false bull from Rome, and before he has described Griselda's sorrowful return to her father's house. Boccaccio, on the other hand, follows a different narrative method by inserting what information he chooses to give concerning the message almost parenthetically after he has written of preparations for the new wedding being completed.

The rather long passage from Chaucer is noteworthy not only as showing details that are not grouped at this point in Petrarch's story, and are grouped in the later description by Boccaccio, but also as affording a glimpse of Chaucer's method in the handling of his translation. Petrarch's fifty-one words of bald and indifferent Latin are expanded into 176 words of English that almost place the little cavalcade accompanying the children before our eyes.

In the message which Walter sends to Bologna, according to Petrarch's abstract of it, there is nothing about honorable accompaniment,<sup>5</sup> nor any injunction, except an implied one, to keep the true identity of the girl secret. Yet Chaucer has these small details almost exactly as they are in Boccaccio. Moreover, Walter's relation by marriage to the House of Panago is not specifically mentioned at this point by Petrarch, and is mentioned by Boccaccio and Chaucer. "Pregandol" in Boccaccio and "preyde" occurring three times in the Chaucer passage attract notice.

At first blush it might appear certain that Chaucer has here expanded one of Petrarch's passages, adding details from Boccaccio. However, it is only fair to consider possible places in Petrarch to which Chaucer may have gone for hints of the information he has collected in this expansion. We find that Petrarch mentions the relationship of Walter's sister to the Count of Panago when he

<sup>5</sup> Of course, Petrarch says that the Count did start for Saluzzo "cum eximia nobilium comitiua" (p. 164), but he does not say that Walter requested or directed this.

says that the girl is taken to her for rearing: "ad sororem suam, quae illic Comiti de Panico nupta erat."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Chaucer's words in the passage before us are closer to the Latin than to the Italian, so far as the expression of this relationship is concerned. A hint for another matter could have been obtained by Chaucer at the same early point in the Petrarch version. When the girl is sent to the sister, Petrarch, following Boccaccio, mentions this injunction to keep the child's identity secret: "ut cuius filia esset a nemine posset agnosci."<sup>7</sup>

That Chaucer had these earlier passages from Petrarch in mind when he wrote of Walter's message to his kinsman is entirely probable; the following of Petrarch in the description of relationship makes this almost certain. But the fact remains that the account of Walter's message in Chaucer is not like that in Petrarch, and is almost exactly like that in Boccaccio. We may grant that Chaucer could naturally have felt the impulse to expand his bare Latin text at this point, and we may grant that for the details he assembles here he might have obtained hints at various places in Petrarch, but we may well ask how he happened to put these details together in just such a way that they made the original expanded version as it appears in Boccaccio. If this is mere coincidence, it is surely a most amazing example.

'The smok,' quod he, 'that thou hast on thy bak,  
Lat it be stille, and *ber it forth with thee.*'  
But wel unnethes thilke word he spak,  
But wente his wey for rewthe and for pitee. (ll. 834-7.)

Gualtieri, che maggior voglia di piagnere avea che d'altro,  
stando pur col viso duro, disse: "e tu una camicia *ne porta.*"  
(p. 165.)

Abundabant uiro lachrymae, ut contineri amplius iam non  
possent, itaque faciem auertens, & "camisiam tibi unicam  
habeto," uerbis trementibus uix expressit. (p. 165.)

Besides the suggestion of "ne porta" in "ber it forth with thee" there is also worthy of notice the fact that Chaucer here departs from Petrarch's details, and that his change, brief though the space is in which it is made, affects the character of Walter.

<sup>6</sup> *Originals and Analogues*, p. 161.      <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

The flowing tears and trembling voice, which are hardly a happy artistic addition on Petrarch's part, are not duplicated in Chaucer, where the actions of Walter are much more like those in Boccaccio's version.

Here again, however, we must consider a possible hint from another passage in Petrarch. The phrase "ber it forth with thee" could conceivably take inspiration from the Latin preceding that which has been quoted. Griseldis, speaking of her dowry several lines before Walter's final short speech, says: "at quid iubes dotem meam mecum ut *auferam*." <sup>s</sup> "Auferam" is, of course, equivalent to "bear forth," and it is possible that Chaucer made Walter use Griseldis's own word when he came to make him speak of the "smok." But this cannot explain the change Chaucer makes in the episode which brings it closer to Boccaccio's conception.

I have no wommen suffisaunt certayn  
*The chambres for t'arraye in ordinaunce*  
 After my lust, and therfor wolde I fayn  
 That thyn were al swich maner governaunce; (ll. 904-7.)

. . . e tu sai che io non ho in casa donne che mi *sappiano*  
*acconciare le camere* nè fare molte cose che a così fatta festa  
 si richeggiono; e perciò tu, che meglio che altra persona queste  
 cose di casa sai, *metti in ordine* quello che da far ci è, . . .  
 (pp. 166-7.)

. . . domi tamen foeminas ad hoc opus idoneas non habeo,  
 proinde tu, quamvis ueste inopi, hanc tibi quae mores meos  
 nosti, optimè suscipiendorum locandorumque hospitum curam  
 sumes." (pp. 166-7.)

Line 905 of Chaucer little suggests any idea in "ad hoc opus idoneas" nor in the Latin preceding the quotation I have made, but furnishes a striking parallel with the Italian. Indeed, one could hardly translate "acconciare le camere" more literally than by "the chambres for t'arraye," and "in ordinaunce" suggests inspiration from the Italian "in ordine," although the Italian words do not occur in the phrase corresponding to the English. The Latin "ad hoc opus" is indefinite, but the phrase mentioning the preparation of the rooms is specific. How is it that when Chaucer wished to become specific he again utilized detail exactly

<sup>s</sup> *Originals and Analogues*, p. 165.

as it appears in Boccaccio? It is true that in Petrarch Walter speaks of placing the guests,<sup>9</sup> and of according them honor after their ranks; and it is to be admitted that this could have suggested "chambres" to Chaucer. But there is still a tantalizing likeness in idea and words between Chaucer and Boccaccio.

O thing biseke I yow and warne also,  
That ye ne prikke with no tormentinge  
This tendre mayden, as ye han don mo;  
For she is fostred in hir norishinge  
More tendrely, and, to my supposinge,  
*She coude nat adversitee endure*  
*As coude a povre fostred creature.'* (ll. 981-7.)

. . . ma quanto posso vi priego, che quelle punture, le qualr all'altra, che vostra fu, già deste, non diate a questa; chè appena che io creda *che ella le potesse sostenere*, sì perchè più giovane è, e sì ancora perchè in delicatezze è allevata, *ove colei in continue fatiche da piccolina era stata.* (p. 168.)

. . . unum bona fide te precor ac moneo, ne hanc illis aculeis agites, quibus alteram agitasti. Nam quod & iunior & delicatius enutrita est, pati quantum ego auguror non ualeret. (p. 168.)

The Latin furnishes a close source for ll. 981-5 of Chaucer in the above extract. The last two lines, however, Chaucer has expanded from the Latin in a way that suggests very definitely the Italian, as I have attempted to show by italicization. This resemblance is small but striking.

The lines of Chaucer are the subject of a remark by Mr. Skeat relative to the refined modesty of Griselda, especially in referring to herself as "mo."<sup>10</sup> Miss Winstanley thinks that in the portraying of modesty in Griselda here Chaucer makes a departure from Petrarch which brings him closer to Boccaccio.<sup>11</sup> She has no

<sup>9</sup> Cf. "locandorunque," p. 167.

<sup>10</sup> See *Chaucer*, v, p. 350: "Chaucer, who throughout surpasses his original in delicacy of treatment, did not permit himself to be outdone here; and Boccaccio also has the word *altra*. The use of *me* would have been a direct charge of unkindness, spoiling the whole story."

<sup>11</sup> See *The Clerke's Tale and the Squire's Tale*, p. lxxxiii, note 3: "It will be noticed that Boccaccio does not make Griselda refer to herself directly but very delicately as 'all'altra, che vostra fu' and 'colei'; Petrarch puts this much more bluntly: . . ."



hesitation in ascribing whatever of restoration she finds in Chaucer in this instance to "sheer force of poetic insight."<sup>12</sup>

Thise ladyes, whan that they hir tyme say,  
 Han taken hir, and *in-to chambre goon*,  
 And strepen hir out of hir rude array,  
*And in a cloth of gold that brighte shoon*,  
 With a coroune of many a riche stoon  
 Up-on hir heed, *they in-to halle hir broghte*,  
*And ther she was honoured as hir oghte.* (ll. 1058-64.)

Le donne lietissime levato dalle tavole, con Griselda *n'andarono in camera*, e con migliore agurio, trattile i suoi pannicelli, *d'una nobile roba delle sue la rivestirono*, e come donna, la quale ella eziandio negli stracci pareva, *nella sala la rime-narono.* (p. 169.)

. . . raptimque matronae alacres ac fauentes circum fusae, uilibus exutam suis, solitis uestibus induunt exornantque, plaususque laetissimus & fausta omnium uerba circumsont, . . . (p. 169.)

Here besides an expansion of the Latin which makes the whole incident more like that in Boccaccio's version than that in Petrarch's we find in Chaucer two small details which Boccaccio uses but which Petrarch does not. That Chaucer might by his own inspiration have Griselda taken out of the hall for the dressing preparatory to her rehabilitation is to be admitted, but the fact remains that Petrarch is absolutely silent as to the detail, and that Chaucer is astonishingly close to Boccaccio. Moreover, there is a definite similarity between Italian and English words, such as "camera" and "chambre," "sala" and "halle," "n'andarono" and "han goon." It may be freely granted that these are inevitable words in each case, and that they might have been used naturally by Chaucer to describe the episode. But the combination of these identical words and the information found in Boccaccio and Chaucer, though not in Petrarch, merits careful judging. We have met before in our small array of parallel passages resemblances which might be explained as chance occurrences. But the evidence is cumulative. We have not only found mere echoes of Boccaccio in Chaucer; what is more important, we have found Chaucer more than once using actual bits of information, small though they may

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. lxxxiii, note 3.

be, which cannot come from Petrarch and which seem to come from Boccaccio. Such is the case with the passage just discussed.

In making a comparison such as has been essayed, one feels the lack of a critical edition of Petrarch's Latin. The text printed by the Chaucer Society<sup>13</sup> is almost surely not exactly like that which Chaucer must have used.<sup>14</sup> The old question of whether Chaucer actually received his manuscript from the hands of Petrarch or not need not concern us here. The indication seems to be that wherever Chaucer obtained his manuscript of Petrarch's Latin it was very possibly corrupt in some details, though in how many we cannot say. Fortunately, however, such probable corruptions as have been pointed out by Mr. Hendrickson consist of changes in single words, such as the substitution of "honestatis" for "honestatus."<sup>15</sup> It is entirely probable then that any divergence between the Chaucer Society text and Chaucer's own, even though both were at some time corrupted, would not explain Chaucer's apparent reversions from Petrarch to Boccaccio. It is most unlikely that whole phrases and ideas in Petrarch would be so changed by mere corruption.

I have made a studious attempt to refrain as much as possible from argument as to the how and why of any resemblance between Chaucer and Boccaccio which cannot well be explained by recourse to Petrarch. Nor shall any systematic explanation be undertaken now. A few of the resemblances are possibly elusive enough to be called only curious coincidences in the narrative methods of two great story-tellers. If the parallels were granted the very lightest importance possible, they would be at least highly interesting small revelations of the way in which Chaucer's genius is nearer to Boccaccio's than to Petrarch's. But it would seem that more than this degree of importance is possible and to a greater or less degree probable, whatever the exact explanation for the phenomena may be. The bulk of the parallels is fairly large, and many of them, as we have seen, are much more than elusive in character; indeed, they are often definite. Actual facts and sometimes characteristic modes of expression not found in Petrarch apparently get from Boccaccio to Chaucer in some mysterious way. Did Chaucer have some written material to supplement his supposed main source, the Latin of Petrarch?

<sup>13</sup> From *Francisci Petrarcae Opera*, Basileae, 1581.

<sup>14</sup> G. L. Hendrickson, *Mod. Phil.*, iv, pp. 190-2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

In any explanation the following are among possibilities that might have to be considered.

1. Chaucer actually saw the *Decameron* in the original.
2. In some way Chaucer saw Boccaccio's story of Griselda in the original Italian but separated from its place in the framework of the *Decameron*.

3. Chaucer saw an English or French translation of the *Decameron* or of the separate Griselda story as Boccaccio told it. In this connection may be quoted the interesting passage in Sacchetti in which he seems to say that the *Decameron* was translated into both English and French, though unfortunately the text is so bad that we cannot be sure of exactly what he means. Gaps in the text are due to *lacunae* in the manuscript.

... e riguardando in fine allo eccellente poeta fiorentino messer Giovanni Boccacci, il quale descrivendo il libro delle Cento Novelle per una materiale cosa, quanto al nobil suo ingegno . . . quello è divulgato e richio . . . che insino in Francia e in Inghilterra l'hanno ridotto alla loro lingua, e grand . . .<sup>16</sup>

4. Chaucer had a manuscript of Petrarch's Latin in the margins of which were quotations from Boccaccio's Italian, just as there are now in the margins of the Ellesmere and Hengwrt mss. of Chaucer quotations from Petrarch (see above).

Perhaps none of these is the most likely possibility. All four are highly tentative offerings. By a consideration of the first and third the most startling and far-reaching questions are raised, for if Chaucer knew the *Decameron* in its entirety, why did he not filch a large amount of material from it, as we should naturally expect him to have done? This might very possibly be bound up with the very vexing problem raised by Chaucer's strange neglect to mention the name of Boccaccio, much as he uses him.

However, thus much seems at once apparent. The similarities between Boccaccio's and Chaucer's tale of Griselda which cannot be explained by means of Petrarch are of such number and character that they cannot be lightly dismissed as ordinary coincidences due to Chaucer's sheer genius for divining a better original through

<sup>16</sup> See *Proemio del Trecento Novelle* of Franco Sacchetti. I quote from the edition *Delle Novelle di Franco Sacchetti*, Londra, 1795, p. 4. For calling my attention to this passage I am indebted to Professor J. D. M. Ford.

a free redaction. Even if they are regarded as coincidences, they are surely far from ordinary, so much so, in fact, that the laws of chance must suffer much stretching to cover the facts in the case. If, on the other hand, the similarities are not regarded as coincidences, it seems that they must be regarded as evincing some sort of contact, direct or circuitous, between Chaucer and that part of the *Decameron* at least in which the story of Griselda is related. In our present state of knowledge we are apparently unable to settle upon the way in which such contact could best have been established, but the possibility of its existence is none the less real and none the less significant.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> After this article was in its present form, Professor Cook's arguments for the use of the *Ménagier* were published (*Romanic Review*, VIII, 210 ff.). I do not feel, however, that Professor Cook's parallels between Chaucer and the *Ménagier*, numerous as they are, can be successfully used to explain Chaucer's departure from Petrarch, apparently in favor of Boccaccio, here gathered together. Only one of Professor Cook's findings touches very directly any likeness I have found between the English and the Italian. This is contained in the following passage from the French, which may be compared with the last group of parallel passages in the article above: "Les dames et damoiselles joyeusement plourans prirent leur dame Grisilidis et tantost l'enmenèrent *en une chambre* et lui dévestirent ses povres robes et vestemens et la revestirent des autres et la receurent à marquise comme il appartenoit" (*Ménagier*, ed. 1846, I, 124). Professor Cook notices the parallel in "en une chambre" (No. 21, *Romanic Review*, VIII, 215). In other ways, however, Chaucer is here closer to Boccaccio than he is to the French author, as may be easily seen. On the whole, after a careful examination of passages in the *Ménagier* corresponding to those I have quoted from Boccaccio and Petrarch, I have come to the conclusion that the *Ménagier*, whatever its relationship to Chaucer may be, is not the key to the present particular problem.